


VERTIGO

FABLES™

No. 77 WILLINGHAM
BUCKINGHAM
PEPOY

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suggested for
mature readers
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TABRUT. ONE AMONG THE MYRIAD WORLDS OF THE RECENTLY DECAPITATED EMPIRE.

MOUSE, COME HERE. LOOK AT THIS.



A LAND NOW IN THE GRIP OF VIOLENT REVOLUTION.

MORE CORPSES. SO WHAT? YOU'RE GOING TO GET A LOT OF THOSE WHEN PEOPLE REBEL AGAINST THEIR GOVERNMENT.



YEAH, BUT I THINK THIS ONE WAS THE KING. LOOKS A BIT LIKE HIM ANYWAY, THOUGH I NEVER SAW THE MAN UP CLOSE BEFORE.

IMAGINE THAT, TREATING OUR BELOVED TYRANT SO SHABBILY.

WELL, HE DID ENOUGH EVIL IN HIS LIFE TO DESERVE IT.



Life in a Headless Empire



Chapter One of THE DARK AGES



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IN ANY CASE, IT'S **LOOT** I'M AFTER-- NOT MOURNING A CORRUPT KING WHO WAS ALWAYS TOO READY TO DO THE FAR EMPEROR'S BIDDING.

WELL, WE'LL FIND NO TREASURE HERE.


WHOEVER MADE THIS MESS, RETIRING THE PREVIOUS REGIME, WILL ALREADY HAVE PICKED THE PALACE **CLEAN**.



MY FRIEND, WE ARRIVED TOO LATE TO GET A PORTION OF ANY BOOTY KEPT HERE.

SO WHERE DO WE GO TO GET OUR FAIR SHARE?

THE LEGENDARY MERCENARY TEAM OF **FREDDY** AND **MOUSE** CAN HARDLY BE THE **ONLY** ONES TO MISS OUT ON THE LOOTING IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES.



WHERE WOULD OUR VAUNTED REPUTATIONS BE **THEN**?


THERE'S A HIDDEN ROAD THAT GOES UP INTO THE MOUNTAINS FROM HERE. IT LEADS TO A SMALL FORT FEW KNOW ABOUT--

--FORT RESOLVE, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



I WAS ONE OF THE GUARDS ON A MULE CARAVAN ONCE THAT TOOK A PRETTY HUGE LOAD OF TREASURE UP THERE.

I'D HAZARD THE FREEDOM-LOVING REBELS HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF HEADING UP THERE YET. TOO MANY LOWLAND CITIES STILL TO LIBERATE.



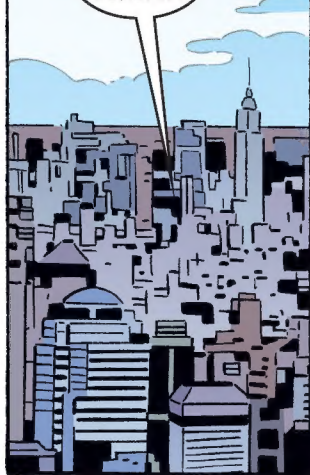
THEN, BY ALL MEANS, **FREDDY**, LET'S BE ON OUR WAY, WITH ALL EXPEDIENCY.

AND DEPRIVE THE CROWS AND OTHER SCAVENGERS OF THEIR SHARE OF THE **SPOILS**? LORD FORFEND.

YOU DON'T WANT TO BURY OLD **CUPPERHAND** FIRST? AFTER ALL, HE WAS OUR KING FOR THE PAST TWENTY YEARS. BAD AS HE WAS, WE EARNED GOOD WAGES IN HIS EMPLOY.

MANHATTAN.

HOLD STILL, SON. THIS PART'S DELICATE.



THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA HOSPITAL.

YOU'RE GOING TO FEEL A SLIGHT PINCH NOW.

EVERY TIME YOU SAY THAT, WHAT I ACTUALLY FEEL IS A NEARLY UNBEARABLE SHOCK OF PAIN LANCING THROUGH MY ARM.



I DON'T MEAN TO BE A BIG BABY, DOCTOR, BUT ARE YOU **SURE** I CAN'T HAVE ANY ANESTHETIC? JUST A LOCAL SHOT OR TWO?

YOU'VE SUFFERED A HIGHLY MAGICAL **WOUND**, YOUNG MAN. ANESTHETICS COULD REACT IN UNFORESEEN WAYS WITH THE MALIGNANT SORCERIES.

BUT NOT TO WORRY. I'M THE GREATEST MILITARY SURGEON IN A THOUSAND WORLDS. I'LL HAVE YOU FIXED AND FINISHED, WITH A **MINIMUM** OF DISCOMFORT, IN NO TIME AT ALL.



THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID DURING THE **LAST** TWO OPERATIONS, DOCTOR SWINEHEART. HOW DID YOU **MISS** GETTING ALL OF THE ARROW'S PARTS OUT THOSE OTHER TIMES?



I **DIDN'T** MISS A SINGLE SLIVER OF THE ARROW. WE'VE REASSEMBLED IT COMPLETE, SO THERE'S NO POSSIBILITY SOME OF IT REMAINS IN YOUR ARM.

THEN WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? THE WOUND WAS GETTING BETTER EVERY DAY, BUT THEN--



BUT THEN AN UNEXPECTED **INFECTION** SET IN. AS TO WHY--WELL, THAT'S WHAT I'M EXPLORING TO DETERMINE.

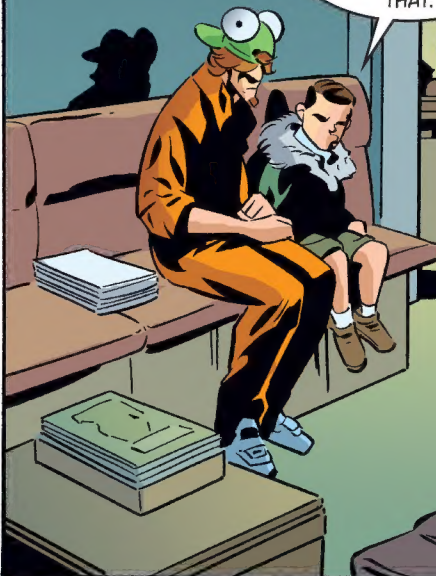
IT'S ACTUALLY A SIMPLE PROCEDURE. I MERELY NEED TO CUT OUT ANY NECROTIC MATERIAL, THOROUGHLY **FLUSH** THE WOUND, WITH MORE POWERFUL DISINFECTANTS THIS TIME--

AND THEN SEW ME UP AGAIN?

PRECISELY.



WHAT COULD BE **TAKING** SO LONG, PINOCCHIO? HE'S BEEN IN THERE FOR A WHOLE BUNCH OF HOURS AND A WHOLE BUNCH OF **HALF** HOURS.



ACTUALLY, IT'S ONLY BEEN FORTY MINUTES. BUT I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM TOO. EVERY OTHER WOUNDED FABLE IN THE WAR HAS BEEN MENDED JUST FINE.

AND SOME OF THEM WERE **REALLY** BAD OFF--MISSING LEGS AND EXPLODED BITS, AND CRAP LIKE THAT.

WHY DOES BLUE HAVE TO KEEP GOING BACK, OVER AND OVER, FROM ONE MINOR **SCRATCH**?



AND JUST A FEW BLOCKS ACROSS TOWN...

ALL WE WANT IS OUR GUNS BACK, BEAUTY, AND A LIFT FROM BOY BLUE TO ONE OF THE EMPIRE WORLDS, WHERE WE CAN CARVE OUT OUR OWN HUMBLE PIECE OF A VERY BIG PIE.

BLUE AND THE WITCHING CLOAK AREN'T AVAILABLE FOR NOW, MR. BROOM. AND THEY AREN'T YOUR GUNS. THEY BELONG TO FABLETOWN.

BUT YOU CAN'T JUST MAKE WARRIOR-KILLERS OF US AND THEN CAST US ASIDE!

DO YOU HAVE THAT LIST OF CARS GOING UP TO THE FARM FOR PRINCE CHARMING'S MEMORIAL, HONEY? I NEED TO MATCH DRIVERS WITH PASSENGERS.

IT'S ALREADY ON YOUR DESK, SWEETIE. TOP OF YOUR IN-BOX.

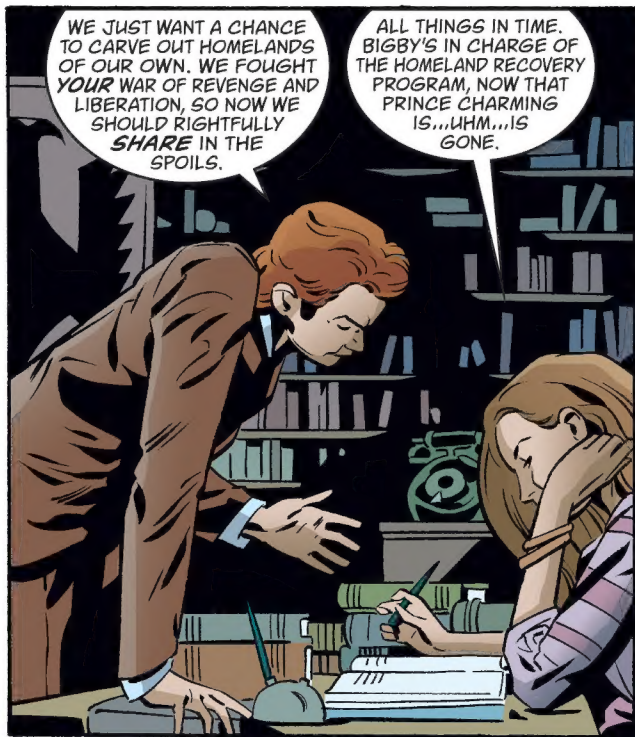
THANKS, PUMPKIN.

WE'RE THE S.O.S.! THE SOCIETY OF SECONDS! AND I'M OUR ELECTED SPOKES-MAN.

SO? THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN ANYTHING TO ME?

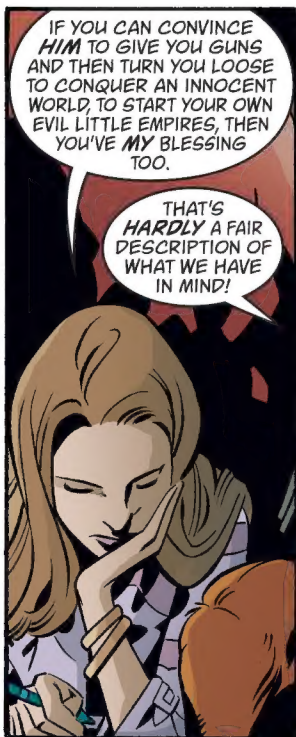
WE'RE THE SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION FABLES-- AND SO ON--WHO WERE BORN HERE IN THE MUNDY WORLD AND DON'T HAVE SPECIFIC HOMELANDS TO RETURN TO.





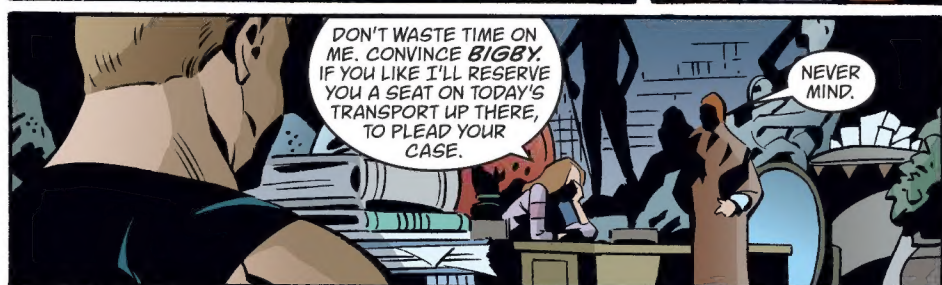
WE JUST WANT A CHANCE TO CARVE OUT HOMELANDS OF OUR OWN. WE FOUGHT YOUR WAR OF REVENGE AND LIBERATION, SO NOW WE SHOULD RIGHTFULLY **SHARE** IN THE SPOILS.

ALL THINGS IN TIME. BIGBY'S IN CHARGE OF THE HOMELAND RECOVERY PROGRAM, NOW THAT PRINCE CHARMING IS...UHM...IS GONE.



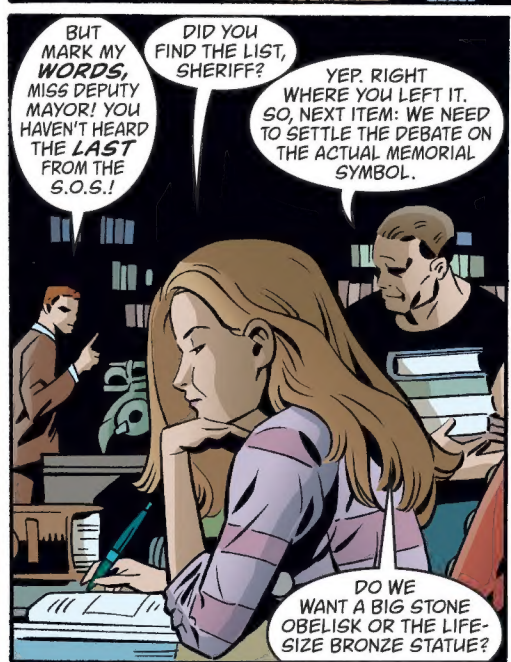
IF YOU CAN CONVINCE **HIM** TO GIVE YOU GUNS AND THEN TURN YOU LOOSE TO CONQUER AN INNOCENT WORLD, TO START YOUR OWN EVIL LITTLE EMPIRES, THEN YOU'VE **MY** BLESSING TOO.

THAT'S **HARDLY** A FAIR DESCRIPTION OF WHAT WE HAVE IN MIND!



DON'T WASTE TIME ON ME. CONVINCE **BIGBY** IF YOU LIKE I'LL RESERVE YOU A SEAT ON TODAY'S TRANSPORT UP THERE, TO PLEAD YOUR CASE.

NEVER MIND.

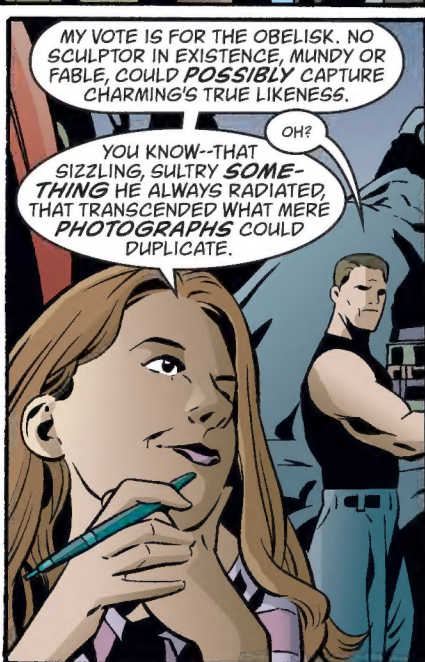


BUT MARK MY **WORDS**, MISS DEPUTY MAYOR! YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THE **LAST** FROM THE S.O.S.!

DID YOU FIND THE LIST, SHERIFF?

YEP RIGHT WHERE YOU LEFT IT. SO, NEXT ITEM: WE NEED TO SETTLE THE DEBATE ON THE ACTUAL MEMORIAL SYMBOL.

DO WE WANT A BIG STONE OBELISK OR THE LIFE-SIZE BRONZE STATUE?



MY VOTE IS FOR THE OBELISK. NO SCULPTOR IN EXISTENCE, MUNDY OR FABLE, COULD **POSSIBLY** CAPTURE CHARMING'S TRUE LIKENESS.

OH?

YOU KNOW--THAT **SIZZLING, SULTRY SOMETHING** HE ALWAYS RADIATED, THAT TRANSCENDED WHAT MERE **PHOTOGRAPHS** COULD DUPLICATE.



BACK IN THE WORLD OF TIABRUT...

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE ME FEEL GUILTY ABOUT SERVING IN KING CUPPERHAND'S ARMY, FREDDY, NO MATTER HOW VILE HE WAS.



WE'RE MERCENARIES. AND WHAT IS A MERCENARY'S HIGHEST DUTY?

TO GET PAID.



EXACTLY RIGHT--AND TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SPEND THAT PAY.

NOW, WE HAD A CHOICE TO FIGHT WITH THE KING OR AGAINST HIM.

BUT SINCE THE KING HAD THE BACKING OF THE EMPIRE, THOSE WHO FOUGHT AGAINST HIM TENDED TO DIE--IN QUITE REMARKABLE NUMBERS.



I KNOW YOU KNOW THIS BECAUSE YOU'VE REMARKED UPON IT MORE THAN ONCE.

HOWEVER, THOSE WHO FOUGHT WITH THE KING GENERALLY SURVIVED TO SPEND THEIR PAY.



CASE CLOSED, MY HIRSUTE FRIEND. WE WERE LEGALLY AND MORALLY IN THE RIGHT.

LOOK THERE. I THINK I SPY THE FORT AHEAD. LOOSEN YOUR SWORD, MOUSE. WE MAY HAVE TO FIGHT OUR WAY IN.



FABLETOWN.

SIT DOWN, GEPPETTO. MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE. POUR YOURSELF SOME TEA IF YOU LIKE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME, OLD WOMAN?

I THOUGHT IT WAS TIME WE MET, FACE TO FACE. AFTER ALL, YOU'RE A RESIDENT OF THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR NOW, AND THEREFORE PART OF MY LITTLE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS.

AH, SO YOU MUST BE THE WITCH EVERYONE IS SO IMPRESSED WITH. I USED TO HAVE UNAUTHORIZED WITCHES HANGED IN MY EMPIRE.

AMONG SO MANY OTHER ACTS OF EXCESS.

ONCE AGAIN, WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

YOU WERE ATTEMPTING TO CONJURE IN YOUR ROOM LAST NIGHT. THAT SIMPLY WON'T DO. NOW THAT YOU'RE ONE OF US, YOU NEED TO CONDUCT YOURSELF AS SUCH.

HOW DID YOU--?

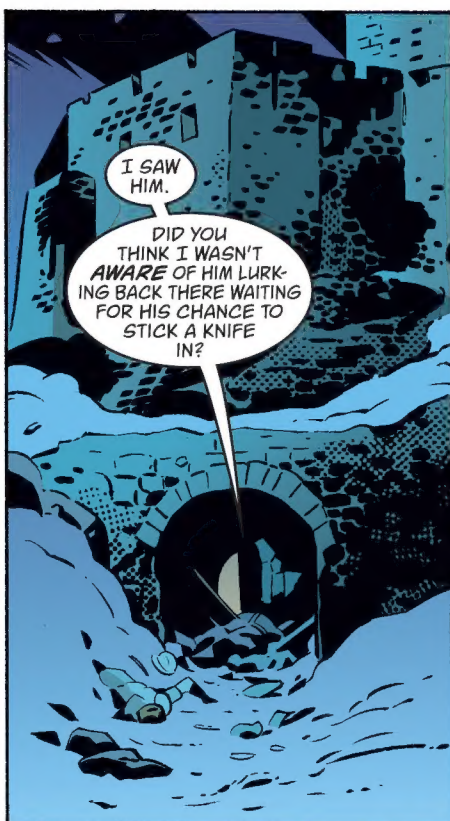
SPELLS DON'T WORK WHEN YOU'VE GOT NO POWER SOURCE TO DRAW FROM. AND YOU'VE NO POWER IN MY GROUP, SAVE THAT I ALLOW IT.

I'VE SEVERED ALL OF YOUR LINKS TO OUTSIDE SOURCES. LEARN TO BEHAVE YOURSELF.



IN TIABRUT...

LOOK
OUT, MOUSE.
GOB TO YOUR
REAR.



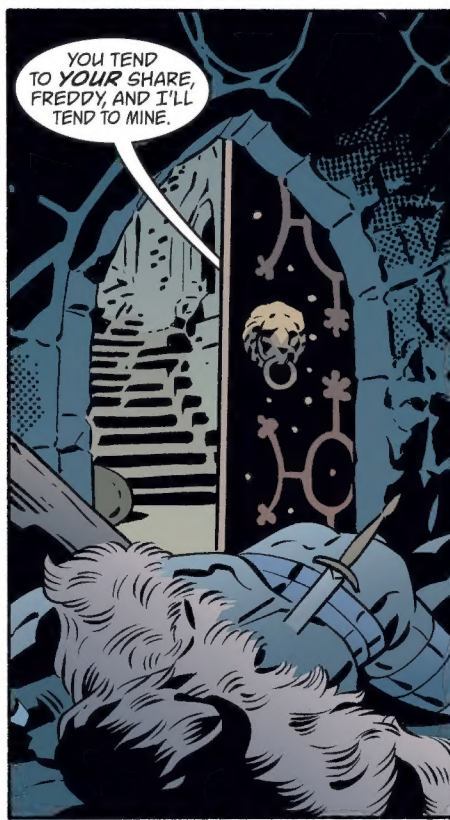
I SAW
HIM.

DID YOU
THINK I WASN'T
AWARE OF HIM LURK-
ING BACK THERE WAITING
FOR HIS CHANCE TO
STICK A KNIFE
IN?



JUST
LOOKING OUT
FOR MY BEST
MATE.

NO OFFENSE
INTENDED.



YOU TEND
TO **YOUR** SHARE,
FREDDY, AND I'LL
TEND TO MINE.



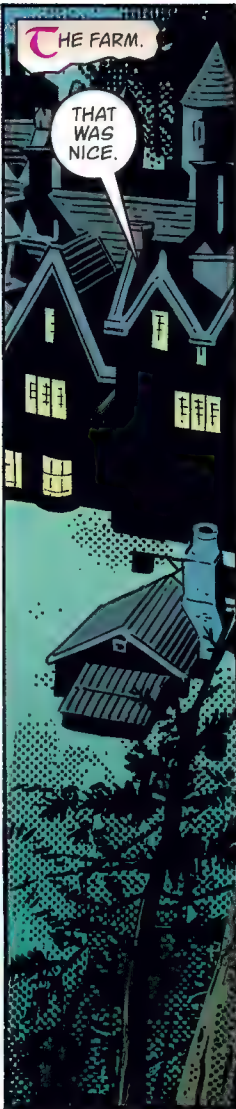


MINE ARE ALL DONE ANYWAY. YOU?

I'M GOOD. WE SEEM TO HAVE CHOPPED THE LAST OF THEM.

WELL, IT'S PRETTY CLEAR WE'VE BOTH MADE OUR FORTUNE, AT LONG LAST, FREDDY. THERE'S MORE HERE THAN WE CAN HAUL AWAY IN A DOZEN ROUND TRIPS.

I WONDER IF THERE ARE ANY WAGONS IN THEIR STABLES?



THE FARM.

THAT WAS NICE.



ONLY NICE?

OKAY, CAPTAIN SINBAD, SIR, IT WAS *WONDERFUL*-- WHICH IS, Y'KNOW, NICE.

SO, HOW WILL WE FILL THE NEXT TWENTY MINUTES, UNTIL YOU CAN--WELL, YOU KNOW, GO AGAIN?



YOU TELL *ME*. YOU ALWAYS HAVE AN IDEA IN MIND FOR SUCH NECESSARY PAUSES.




WELL, YOU COULD TELL ME MORE OF YOUR *ADVENTURES* AFTER THE GLORY BURNED.

WHEN YOU LAST LEFT OFF, YOU WERE GUARDING PRINCE CHARMING WHILE HE WAS PULLING THE FINAL CARPET BOMB.



OH, YES. WE'D JUST DISPATCHED THE GOBLIN PATROL. THERE WERE ONLY SIX OF THEM, AND ONLY TWO SURVIVED LONG ENOUGH TO APPROACH WITHIN RANGE OF MY SCIMITAR.


COMMANDER CHARMING FINISHED THE FOUR WITH HIS RIFLE, BUT IT WAS AN IFFY THING, WHAT WITH THE BURN INJURIES TO HIS FACE AND EYES. HIS LONG DISTANCE AIM WAS OFF.




"HE HAD TO WASTE SEVEN PRECIOUS ROUNDS TO HIT FOUR GOBS--BULLETS WE COULDN'T AFFORD TO SPEND."

DAMMIT!

I'VE GOT HIM.



"LATER WE MUTUALLY DECIDED, FABLETOWN REGULATIONS BE DAMNED, ONE OF YOUR ARABIAN ALLIES HAD TO LEARN HOW TO USE A MODERN WEAPON."



IT'S A BREACH LOADER, WHICH MEANS THE BULLETS GO IN HERE.

HMMM.



THERE! DID YOU **SEE** THAT? I HIT THE GOBLIN EVEN THOUGH HE WAS AT LEAST A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY! THIS IS AN AMAZING WEAPON! BETTER THAN THE GREATEST MAGIC SWORD!

CLOSER TO **SIXTY** YARDS, BUT A BLOODY GOOD SHOT FOR A FIRST-TIMER.

OF COURSE LATER I DEDUCED HIS **REAL** PLAN.

ONCE I KNEW HOW TO USE THE RIFLE, I COULD REMAIN OUTSIDE OF THE LAST GATEWAY AND DEFEND OUR POSITION, WHILE HE WENT IN TO ACTIVATE THE BOMB.

I THINK HE KNEW ALL ALONG THAT HE'D HAVE TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF, LEAVING ME OF TWO MINDS. I WANT TO MOURN HIM, ALONG WITH THE REST OF YOU.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING BUT **PRIDE** FOR WHAT HE DID. I IMAGINE YOUR CULTURE WOULD FIND THE JOY I FEEL IN POOR TASTE.

BUT IN MY LANDS SUCH COURAGE HAS TO BE **CELEBRATED** MORE THAN MOURNED. SO, HOW FAR DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL THIS TALE?

ALL THE WAY TO THE **END**, OF COURSE.

AH, BUT I FEAR THE NATURAL END OF MY TALE OF GRAND HEROICS IS WHEN YOU AND I FINALLY TELL BOY BLUE ABOUT OUR NEW... RELATIONSHIP.

I DON'T WANT TO **TALK** ABOUT THAT RIGHT NOW.

MAYBE WE SHOULD GET SOME SLEEP. BUSY DAY TOMORROW.



IN TIABRUT...

AREN'T YOU GOING TO HELP ME LOAD THE WAGONS?



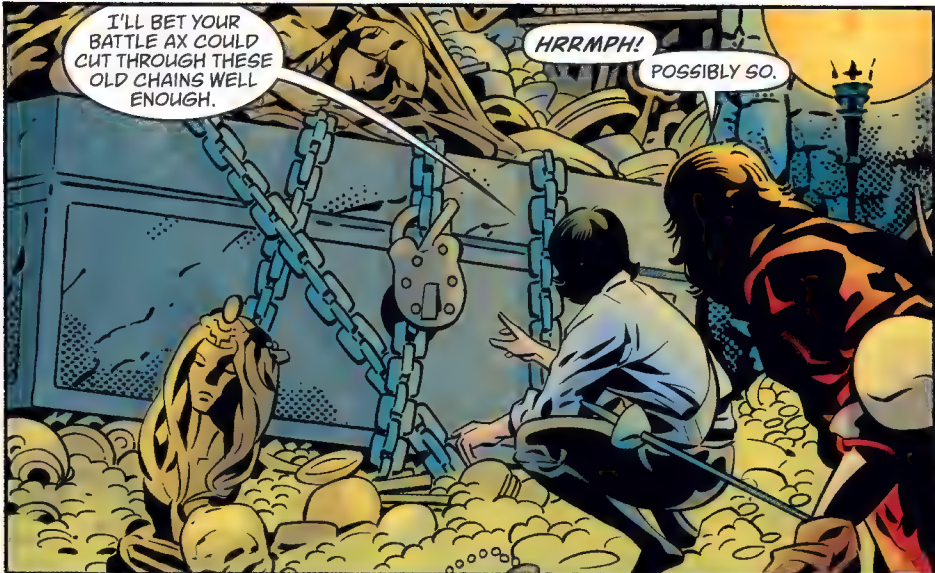
FREDDY? ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME? WE NEED TO LOAD THE WAGONS, BURY THE LOOT SOMEWHERE SAFE, AND THEN COME BACK FOR MORE.

AND THEN DO THAT AGAIN AND AGAIN, ALL BEFORE ANYONE ELSE THINKS OF WANDERING UP THIS WAY.



IT OCCURS TO ME, MY FRIEND, THAT IN THIS VAST ROOM OF AMAZING WEALTH, THE ONE BOX THEY STILL KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY MIGHT CONTAIN THE GREATEST TREASURE OF ALL.

WELL REASONED! LET'S OPEN IT!



I'LL BET YOUR BATTLE AX COULD CUT THROUGH THESE OLD CHAINS WELL ENOUGH.

HRRMPH!

POSSIBLY SO.



STILL, IT WOULD LIKELY RUIN MY AX'S BLADE, THOUGH.

SO WHAT? COMPARED TO WHAT MIGHT BE *INSIDE* THE STONE BOX, WHAT'S ONE MEASLY AX?

BUY YOURSELF A THOUSAND MORE WHEN WE'RE DONE HERE!

TRUE.

HIT IT! GIVE IT A GREAT WHACK!



HMMM. TOUGH CHAIN.

TRY IT AGAIN! REALLY GIVE IT A GOOD ONE THIS TIME!



WANG!

YOU DID IT! QUICK! LET'S OPEN THE BOX AND SEE THE GREATEST TREASURE OF ALL!



NO NEED, MOUSE. IT SEEMS TO BE OPENING ALL ON ITS OWN.

I THINK WE MAY HAVE MADE AN ERROR, FREDDY. I THINK--

OH, DEAR GODS!

NEXT: BAD THINGS FROM GOOD BOXES!



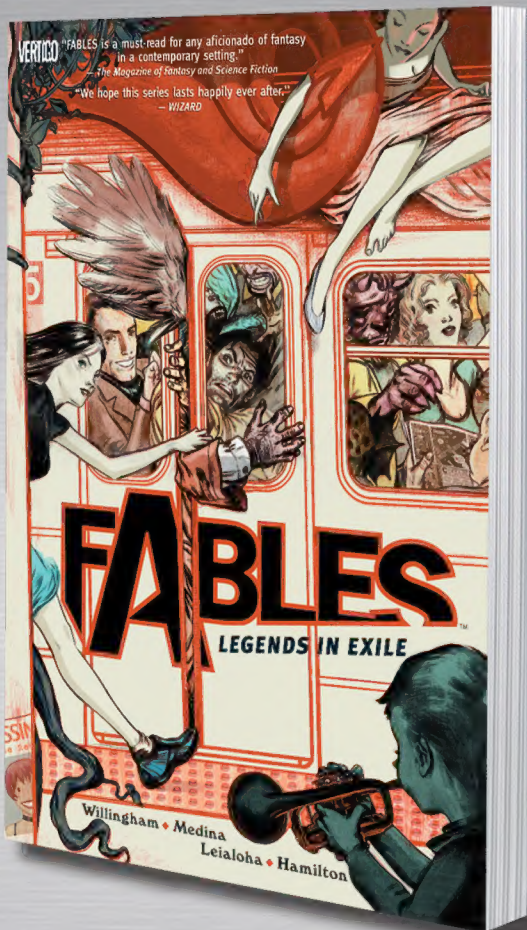
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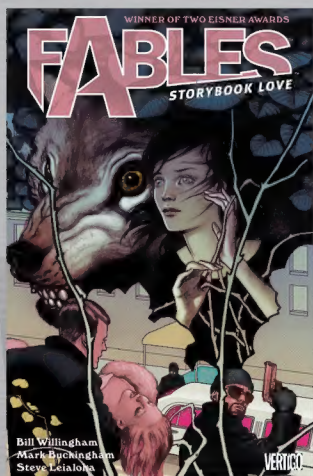
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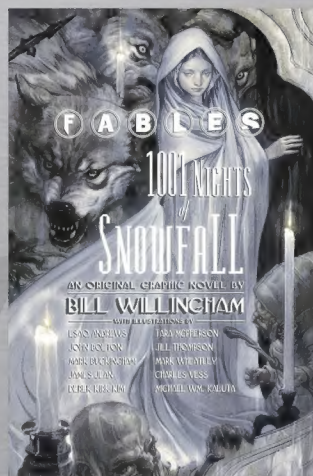
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